

**BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING  
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL  
MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** July 28, 2016

**Meeting # 229**

**Project:** Metro Heights at Mondawmin

**Phase:** Schematic

**Location:** 2700 Reisterstown Road, Baltimore MD 21215

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**PRESENTATION:**

Ron Wilson, Director of Housing Initiative at Enterprise Homes introduced the project and design team of Metro Heights – a 70-unit mixed-income rental apartment building at the corner of Reisterstown Road and Liberty Heights Avenue. The 0.97 acre site is located across from Mondawmin Metro Station and includes a public open space that serves as an entrance to the Greater Mondawmin Neighborhood. Mr. Wilson stated the significance of the project in providing affordable and market-rate housing for a wide variety of users and for claiming a prominent urban corner that could set the tone for further development.

Nancy Liebrecht, Architect with Marks Thomas Architects gave an overview of the existing site conditions, project goals and schematic design proposal that include:

Site Organization

- Redesigned corner plaza aiming to create a sense of place with main building entry and semi-private “porch” overlooking the public space.
- Secondary Entrance from Reisterstown Rd.
- Additional entrances from 14 surface parking spaces and landscape area along adjacent 15’ alley.
- Parking Garage entry from alley to 32 underground parking spaces.

Building Massing Concept

- 4-story building with underground parking with footprint aligned to adjacent rowhouses along Reisterstown and Liberty Heights.
- Transparent volume of common spaces located at the prominent corner of the site in order to establish a strong presence for the project and a top-floor outdoor terrace with views of the city.
- Series of studies of volume interruptions and facade setbacks in order to establish a strong rhythm and variability to the façades through the use of Juliette balconies and “picture frame” surface treatment.

Proposed building materiality includes a combination of brick and fiber cement panels with colors reflective of the brick and stone tones in the area. The project aims at complying with LEED for Homes Midrise 2009 and will include micro bio-retention, native planting, green roof and several sustainable features for the building envelope and environmental systems. The design team also referenced engaging the community and receiving feedback on building organization and key public space interventions.

Lydia Kimball, Landscape Architect with Floura Teeter Landscape Architecture reviewed the design process and proposed interventions for the outdoors spaces including:

- The Community Identity Plaza at the corner featuring a sculptural element on podium at the center, retaining wall with seating, planting buffer and special paving. Previous studies include a larger plaza with potentially interactive community identity elements.
- Semi-private “porch” terrace, elevated from street level, with modern shade structure and outdoor seating.
- Planted strip along both streets with trees and planting along the building’s edge.
- Micro bio-retention along Reisterstown Rd with reclaimed stone walls, private patio and lawn in the rear, plantings that buffer windows and screen service and garage entries.

### **Comments from the Panel:**

The Panel applauded the team’s commitment to the mission of the project, the inclusion of community input in the design process and the preliminary planning for the project’s main programmatic components. The following comments address recommendations for further study:

- **Corner Plaza** – the panel encouraged the design team to explore further the degrees of private and public experiences at the corner plaza with more richness following careful analysis of the variety of activities that would take place – directly, as an organizing element for movement through the corner of the site and indirectly, as a visual destination from various perspectives. The proposed tall element in the center was found to fragment the plaza leaving only circulation space exposed to corner traffic. The use of passive monumental style of art display was discouraged in favor of active, contemporary and site specific interventions that add value to the urban plaza and signal the new energy in the area.
- **Main Entry & “Porch” Terrace** – the panel suggested that the design of the outdoor spaces leverages the transition between public and private by creating areas for various types of interaction – from intimate moments of seating shielded by vegetation to covered entryway and observation area. The panel questioned the applicability of the “porch” concept to this building type without the clear definition of the domain that belongs to the building vs the plaza and the sidewalks.
- **Corner Volume** – the panel agreed that the corner volume is a great location for the communal spaces and for establishing strong views to and from the site but found the architectural articulation to be recessive and encouraged the design team to energize the corner, treat it as a tower element and pursue an approach that is more figural and identifiable, possibly protruding beyond the volume of the rest of the building and engaging the outdoor terrace. As recipient of a strong visual axis, this part of the building needs to signal a gateway to the area and avoid recessive formal gestures.
- **Reisterstown Facade** – the panel found the subtle step in the long façade along Reisterstown Rd to be inadequate for the building’s scale and encouraged the design team to eliminate those and search for a less monotonous approach that breaks down the long façade into few manageable volumes with distinct treatment. The residential entry on that façade needs to be more assertive and provides an opportunity to introduce a significant change to the treatment of that portion of the building. Consider the use of specific materials and volumes to address each frontage in a specific way.
- **Urban, Building and Landscape Design Strategy** – the panel suggested that the design team develops a strategy for treating the Reisterstown and Liberty Heights volumes differently in response to their distinct relationship to the surrounding urban fabric with the possibility of creating a dynamic statement facing the Metro Station. It was also noted that the grass strip buffering the sidewalks from the heavy trafficked streets is highly inadequate in organizing and shading the urban edges while the Micro Bio-retention zone along Reisterstown Rd appears underutilized in its ability to act as extension to the main terrace and reinforce the distinction

between public sidewalk and private domain in a positive way. The panel requested that the design team considers the use of trees on the public side of the sidewalk in order to establish a clear urban edge and develop a distinct language for the treatment of the landscape on the building side based on various uses. Consider the context of the Reisterstown block edge and the individual ‘front yards’ that participate in the streetscape.

The panel found a dis-connect between the urban, landscape and exterior design of the building and encouraged the design team to continue to develop and present the project with a common coordinated strategy.

**Panel Action:**

Recommend Approval of Schematic Design with addressing the comments above.

**Attending:**

Ron Wilson, Ned Howe - Enterprise Homes  
Nancy Liebrecht, Chelsea Thomas - Marks Thomas Architects  
Lydia Kimball, Zachary Boier, Connor Kame - Floura Teeter Landscape Architecture  
Bob Rosenfelt – CMR  
Steve Preston – Parks and People  
Brandon Brooks

Messrs. Bowden, Rubin, Haresign, Burns and Ms. Ilieva\* - UDARP Panel

Anthony Cataldo, Christina Hartsfield, Martin French, Chad Hayes - Planning